

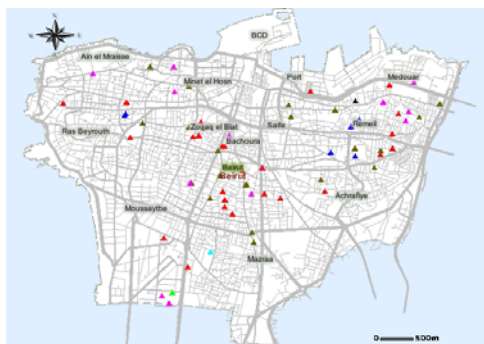


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SUCCESS STORY

Accessibility Study Contributes to Electoral Reform



This Web-based map of Beirut polling stations, created by OTI grantee LPHU, includes links to accessibility details and a photo of each location.

“Accessibility is important because the participation of all citizens in Lebanon is necessary for democratic elections.”

—Faten Abou Hassan, Head of Department of Political and Electoral Affairs, Lebanese Ministry of Interior

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November 2008 – Using the accessibility issue as a doorway to electoral reform dialogue, the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU) is helping to ensure maximum community participation in upcoming elections.

With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), LPHU, in partnership with the Youth Association for the Blind, surveyed and mapped the accessibility of designated polling stations in Beirut. The study revealed that only two of the 73 stations met accessibility standards, despite legislation calling for full electoral inclusion.

Last summer, as Lebanon’s parliamentary elections were being scheduled for mid-2009, LPHU and other civil society actors, equipped with facts, lobbied the government with specific recommendations to improve the accessibility of polling stations.

“An inclusive electoral law system... means access not just for the disabled but also for the elderly, those with temporal disabilities/injuries, and anyone with other special needs,” LPHU president Sylvana Lakkis said. She added that electoral accessibility and participation is a human rights issue, not just a disability concern.

A new electoral law passed in September 2008 included provisions to improve accessibility to polling stations. Although the electoral reforms, overall, were not as comprehensive as anticipated, there was widespread agreement that the new accessibility sections of the law came about at least partly because of LPHU’s efforts.

In fact, the Ministry of Interior requested that the accessibility study be expanded nationwide and has committed to implementing accessibility improvements based on LPHU’s findings.

Building on the work completed with OTI funding, LPHU has, in collaboration with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, leveraged other donor funding to replicate the study nationwide.